

ARTICLE



“I’m New Here...”

Making Friends, Staying Strong,
and Having a Fantastic First Year as
a School Librarian

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Introduction

Fresh out of library school, I headed to rural southern Virginia ready to start my library career. Having prepared to work in public schools in a large suburban county outside of Richmond, I had never expected to be a solo librarian. However life had other plans, and I found myself heading to a private girls' boarding school in need of a library renovation. I found myself weeding thousands of books, picking out furniture and color swatches, organizing student library assistants, and hosting decade nights where students dressed up, had a dance party, and perused our weeded items from each decade (see figure 1). I really needed advice, help, and the feeling of being connected to other librarians.

Be Your Own Friend First

Of the many things my high school girls have taught me, one of my favorites is the acronym FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), defined as "a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" (Przybylski et al. 2013, 1841). In this spirit, I've coined a new term: FOBO (Fear of Burning Out). It's so critically important

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to practice self-care as a new school librarian, especially if you are without an assistant. Taking care of your soul, spirit, and body is just

as important as anything you do in your library. While what you do to prevent burnout will vary based on your priorities, I encourage all new librarians to be extremely careful to continue to make time for family, friends, and whichever activities bring peace and joy. The library, however wonderful it is, can never make up for an unbalanced and unhealthy life.

Self-reflection is also an important piece of the first-year puzzle. Taking fifteen minutes to sit each month

Figure 1. A selection of the library's 1970s items.



Taking fifteen minutes to sit each month and think through what has been successful and what goals you want to continue to pursue can make a big difference in your library program and in your mental health.

and think through what has been successful and what goals you want to continue to pursue can make a big difference in your library program and in your mental health. It is important to know what you want to do and to remind yourself of things that are going well. When things aren't the way you envisioned, frustration can set in. Having a notebook where I wrote monthly goals and "Greats" (things that I was proud of and things that worked) really helped me to see that great things

were happening, even when I felt discouraged (see figure 2).

Taking the Show on the Road

Since I was a solo school librarian in a very rural area, I had to work extra-hard to find library mentors and colleagues. Luckily, I am a member of several professional organizations such as VAASL (Virginia Association of School Librarians), AISL (Association of Independent School Librarians), and ALA/AASL. I am so grateful for the ways in which these associations, their e-mail discussion lists, and conferences have impacted my ability to stay current in the field. I am able to network with other school librarians in similar situations, and it is so nice to have new friends who love the same things that I love! The face-to-face connections made by volunteering in professional organizations are phenomenal. No matter where you are, you can find real-life library friends. The best thing I've done for professional development has been reaching out in person to other librarians. Whether through visiting libraries at my vacation destinations or simply asking nearby librarians to share coffee and talk books, the relationships that I have formed have been transformative to my professional practice. Blogs, Twitter, and webinars have also become very important parts of my professional development. It's amazing what wonderful ideas you can get from your online peers, and you can do it all for free in your pajamas!

I have seen so many instances where advocacy is extremely difficult for younger professionals. It seems that we have a sense that we aren't yet all we need to be to provide exceptional service to our students and that we "don't have enough to brag about yet." Push through this discomfort! Your

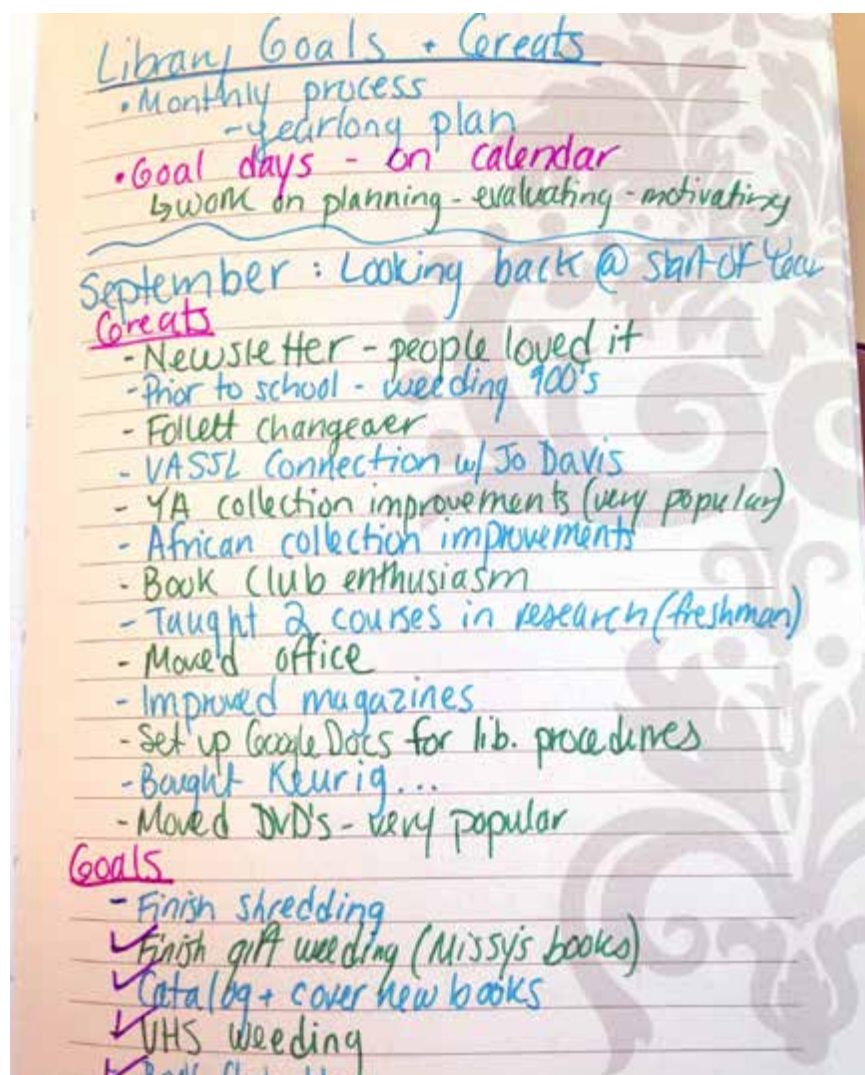


Figure 2. List of Goals/Greats from my first month on the job.

ideas are valuable, and people really do want to hear them. Present at a conference; try writing an article or blog post; volunteer for a committee assignment in your local library association; call the librarian at your neighboring school and set up a coffee date; don't just follow along, but comment on a Twitter chat. You have so many options to put yourself out there, and even baby steps will take you a long way in your professional development.



Carolyn Stenzel is the Library Department chair and Upper School librarian at the Holton-Arms School in Bethesda,

Maryland. She is a member of AASL and is the Independent Schools Committee Chair for the Virginia Association of School Librarians. She was awarded the AASL Frances Henne Award in 2014. You can find her on Twitter @CarolynStenzel.

Whether through visiting libraries at my vacation destinations or simply asking nearby librarians to share coffee and talk books, the relationships that I have formed have been transformative to my professional practice.

Work Cited:

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Recommended Reading:

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Pearle, Laura, and Courtney Lewis. 2010. "We Are Not Alone." In *Independent School Libraries: Perspectives on Excellence*, edited by Dorcas Hand, 49-56. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

Toor, Ruth, and Hilda K. Weisburg. 2007. *New on the Job: A School Library Media Specialist's Guide to Success*. Chicago: ALA.



FIRST YEAR DOS AND DON'TS

Don't give up the things that make your life full and balanced.

Do focus on a few good things, not 500 so-so things.

Do make some changes; I read blogs for two years before starting Twitter.

Don't forget about your goals and greats.

Do think about the amount of time you have to commit.

Don't wait for people to come to you; be proactive!

Do make specific plans about when you'll work on your professional development. For example, I read blogs on my phone while walking my dog.

Don't be a lurker. You have something interesting to say. Other librarians want to hear about your experiences. Don't just follow blogs—write one. Don't just join Twitter—participate in a Twitter chat

TWITTER CHATS

#vaslchat

#macgyverlibrarianship

#tlchat

#libchat

#teacherwellbeingchat